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## Just How Clothes-Conscious are Children?

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What Mother thinks is a pretty dress isn't necessarily the one her daughter will choose. As part of the children's clothing survey, these youngsters get complete freedom to decide what to wear when. Ages range from 5 years to 10 years.

# Just how clothes-conscious are children?

*By Nancy Merchant*

*Child Development Junior*

"WHEN I WEAR a white dress shirt I look like a dressed-up cowboy."

From color to style, children have *definite* clothing likes and dislikes.

Sixty-six Ames children proved this in a research project on children's choice-making in clothing recently finished by the Child Development, Household Equipment and Textiles and Clothing Departments. The project, "Family Attitudes Toward Care and Maintenance of Children's Clothing," was done in cooperation with a research grant by E. I. DuPont de Nemours Company. The last two parts of this study have not been released.

Thirty-three boys and 33 girls, ages 5, 8 and 10, took part in the project. Each child was given a wardrobe

of school clothes to be worn for 5 months, beginning January 3, 1955.

When the results were collected and studied this is what they discovered:

Color played an important part in children's clothing choices. This was the main reason behind the boy's decisions. They liked bright colors best and would wear them in preference to pastels.

Girls, too, were color conscious. "I like the blouse 'cause it matches my hair," one girl replied. However, style was more important to them. Flared or full skirts and clothing with "decoration" topped their lists.

### Comfort important

Comments such as, "I don't like the slip blouse. It isn't comfortable," and, "The sweater's too itchy," show that comfort makes a difference. They disliked any garment that was scratchy, bulky or restricted their movements. Clothing that was easy to get on and off especially pleased 5-year-olds.

Children like to wear clothes like their older brothers, sisters and "grown ups" do. Girls preferred skirts and sweaters to dresses because older sister wears them.

One 8-year-old boy liked wearing a sweater because, "It looks just like the college boys."

As children grow older, social pressures begin to influence their choices. Five-year-olds like to wear a white dress shirt "because it's just like Daddy wears," while 8-year-olds stated, "I just don't go for a white

When boys choose the clothes, they want outfits that feel good and can take lots of movement.



The grade-schooler wants to wear skirts and sweaters because "older sister wears them." Note: she doesn't want them scratchy.

shirt to wear to school," and "You positively should not wear a white shirt to school."

What do these facts mean? Dr. Glenn Hawkes, head of the Child Development Department, says they show that (1) children are conscious of their clothing and have definite opinions, although some of them are not in terms of adult thinking; (2) the type of clothing a child wears is important to how he feels, reacts and gets along with people. His clothing makes a difference whether he feels comfortable, uncomfortable, an outsider or one of the gang; and (3) choosing clothing can give children valuable experience in growing toward maturity and independence in decision-making.



### How The Project Was Done

The clothing used in the project was similar for each age group of boys and girls. The wardrobes were divided into four outfits for each week. On Monday the children could choose between all four outfits; on Tuesday from three; on Wednesday from two and on Thursday they wore the last outfit.

The parents of the children were asked to give them complete freedom in making their clothing choices and not to suggest outfits to them. For 6 weeks they were to ask the child why he chose specific clothes. If the child didn't know the reason or wouldn't say, the parent gave the reason they thought was behind the choice.